



Olin T. Binkley  
Memorial Baptist Church

**A Twenty Year View**  
1958 - 1978

*By Courtland Smith and John L. Humber*



Contrary to the impression some people may have had, this Church did not come into existence as the result of any conflict within any existing Baptist organization; rather, it was started as an extension project of the Yates Baptist Association with the full cooperation and support of the University Baptist Church. In March of 1957, Dr. Fred W. Ellis was asked to join the Church Extension Committee of the Yates Association because the Glen Lennox area of Chapel Hill had been selected as the appropriate location of a new Baptist Church. By the end of August Dr. Ellis reported to the committee that an option had been secured on a plot of two acres located on the 15-501 By-pass, east of Chapel Hill. He recommended that an additional acre be purchased, bringing the total cost of the land to \$7000, with a down payment of \$1000, half of which had been pledged by the North Carolina Baptist State Convention. His proposal was unanimously approved by the Committee August 30, and by the Yates Association Board on September 29, 1957.

Perhaps the most significant part of the history of Binkley Memorial Baptist Church occurred before the organization itself came into being. In November, 1957, the first meeting of a study group looking to the organization of the new church was held at the home of Dr. Ellis. Four families were represented: the Ellises, the M.K. Berkuts, the Bill Moffitts and the Leo Wagoners. Two important decisions were made at this meeting: first, all those interested in the new church would continue all their activities in the University Church until the actual launching of the new organization; and second, they would meet regularly in an extended series of studies to explore the nature and mission of the Church. It was the hope of the group that this careful and prayerful study would lead them to develop an organization that would be true to the authentic Christian mission and at the same time would be effective and relevant to the community and world of which it would be a part.

As the group grew, it was divided into a number of working committees with special responsibilities. Any distinctiveness which is to be found in Binkley Church has its roots here; not that the final form was determined, not that there have been no new decisions to make, but the fundamental direction was charted and the mood and spirit were established.

As the discussion continued, several convictions regarding the nature and mission of the church gradually developed. For one thing, it became clear that the church must be inclusive in its fellowship, that there must be no stated nor hidden barriers based on race, color or national origin. Again, the church must be actively related to the universal impact of the Christian gospel, not only through the traditional missionary enterprise, but also through all possible agencies of interdenominational activity. A third emphasis was that while the church would operate within the Baptist tradition, a vital place must be found within its fellowship for those who had come into the Christian community through other channels. A fourth conviction was that there must be an active effort to relate the Christian faith and ethic to all phases of personal, family and social life.

These convictions found expression in the church documents which were adopted during this preliminary period before the formal organization of the church, and in actions that were taken in the early days. The objectives of the church as stated in its Resolution of Purpose included, "...to provide a church home for college students, and aid them in their search for a satisfying interpretation of the Christian faith, ...to participate in the fulfillment of the worldwide mission obligation of the Church, ...to relate the principles of Christianity to all matters of human concern in such a way that the Christian's intent will be strengthened to keep his secular life in harmony with its religious life." In the Church Covenant, the group pledged itself "to share Christian experiences with other churches of our denomination as we strive to contribute to the spiritual quality of Christ's universal Church; to cooperate with all

churches in their endeavor to bring Christian influence to bear on the affairs of our community and the problems of our society; and to participate in the world-wide Christian fellowship ...to recognize the dignity and sanctity of every person, regardless of position or prestige, reflecting thereby our belief in the brotherhood of man; and try to apply the teachings of Jesus in our ethical relationships in all walks of life." The Constitution provided for the transfer of membership from any other church in the evangelical tradition without requiring immersion, with the proviso that such a member would be ineligible to serve as messenger to any Baptist Convention or Association.

The broad invitation to membership was not without later consequences. One of the first actions of the newly organized Church was to apply to the Yates Baptist Association to be taken under its watchcare as a first step to full membership. This request was granted, but at the end of the year of watchcare, the Yates Association voted to delay action on the matter for another year, with the additional provision that a special committee be appointed to adjust the differences between the Church and the Association over the matter of the reception of members who had not been immersed. At the 1960 session, the Yates Association voted not to receive the Binkley Memorial Baptist Church as a member, but gave assurance that it would be glad to welcome the Church, should it adjust its position to the traditional Baptist standards of membership. At the same time, it voted to transfer the deed to the 15-501 By-pass property to the Church on the sole condition that the Church assume the balance due of \$350. (The interracial nature of the Church was apparently very much on the minds of everyone at the meeting.)\* Neither the Church nor the Association has changed its position and as a result, Binkley remains without any Associational relationship.

In the meantime, the ecumenical emphasis has received two expressions. Immediately upon organization, the Church asked to be received as an individual member of the North Carolina Council of Churches, was accepted, and has continued to be an active member of the Council and to be influential in its leadership. After extended study, the Church, in 1964, requested that it be accepted as a member of the American Baptist Convention. A major reason for the request was the fact that the American Baptist Convention is affiliated with both the National and the World Council of Churches, while the Southern Baptist Convention is connected with neither. Thus Binkley has joined the small but growing group of churches with dual affiliation.

Another of the pre-organizational decisions had to do with a name. Dr. Olin T. Binkley, President of the Southeastern Baptist Seminary at Wake Forest, was formerly pastor of the University Baptist Church and a professor at the University. His liberal spirit, his broad sympathies, his deep devotion to the Christian gospel in all its applications typified the attitudes which the founding group hoped would characterize the new Church. Accordingly, with his consent, the Church was named for him.

The formal institution of the Church was accomplished September 21, 1958, in the auditorium of Hill Hall on the University campus. For approximately six years worship services were held in Gerrard Hall, also on the campus, and church school classes were held in other University buildings. A large residence at 508 East Franklin Street was secured to serve as a Church House with the facilities for church school classes, evening seminar programs, social events and other varied activities. In the meantime, funds were being accumulated toward the construction of a building. The lot on 15-501 By-pass, which had been secured with the aid of the Yates Association, was traded for a larger lot immediately to the north. Mr. F. Carter Williams was selected as the architect. With a gift of \$25,000 from the Myers Park Baptist Church of Charlotte, the way was open to award contracts for the construction of the new building. The

\* This fact was brought to light since this document was written 10 years ago.



groundbreaking ceremony for the fellowship hall and educational wing was held on October 13, 1963. By the day of dedication September 27, 1964, it was already apparent that the new facilities were too small, especially in the educational area. Again it was necessary to rent additional space until facilities could be constructed.

One of the aspects of the pre-organizational study had to do with the characteristics desired in a minister for the Church. The specifications were demanding, but as early as July, 1958, Robert E. Seymour, Pastor of the Mars Hill Baptist Church, was invited to meet with the group. Dr. John T. Wayland of Southeastern Baptist Seminary served as interim pastor pending the selection of a permanent leader. On January 4, 1959, Dr. Seymour was unanimously called to the pastorate and some days later he accepted the call. His pastorate began April 1, 1959, and has continued with increasing effectiveness through the present time. His deep social and personal concern, his selfless devotion and his intellectual leadership have been important factors in accomplishing the dream out of which the Binkley Church was born.

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Just as the early years were preoccupied with organization, membership growth, building planning/construction, and goal setting in the community, so have the years since then been spent in vigorously pursuing those goals through an expanding program of outreach into the community. There also have been numerous occasions when the Church had to staunchly defend those principles upon which it had been so consciously founded.

As was mentioned above, the Yates Baptist Association finally denied membership to Binkley Church in a statement issued in March of 1966, indicating that because each party considered it would be a compromise in principle to accept the other's point of view in the associate membership controversy, it would be best for each to go its separate way. In 1967, the Church underwent a total self-examination during which it further broadened its requirements for full membership, seeking to reaffirm to itself and to the community its concept of the oneness of Christ's Church among all people. The Constitution was completely revised that year. Whereas the old Constitution offered membership to persons from other churches "in the evangelical tradition," the new Constitution made membership available to all persons from any Christian Church. Restrictions against representing the Church on the Diaconate, as a Church Officer or in a church convention were completely removed from all types of membership, except those associating under a Watchcare relationship.

Another challenge to Binkley's open membership policy came in 1973, when the North Carolina State Baptist Convention appointed a Committee of Eleven to study the Convention's relationship with certain "differing" N.C. Baptist churches that accepted people as full members without their having been baptized by immersion. In substance, the Binkley Church responded to the Committee of Eleven by saying that it accepted the New Testament concept of the Christian Church "As a single entity, as the body of Christ in the world," and that baptism was the "public ceremony testifying to the experience that entitles an individual to membership in that body." Therefore, if one's previous baptism by some form other than immersion is not accepted by this membership, it implies that "the body of Christ is not a single entity, but a fragmented one" and that persons not baptized by immersion are not really Christians. This was a concept that Binkley Church could not sanction. While affirming that baptism by immersion had the "greater historical and symbolic clarity" for itself, the Binkley membership did not wish to impose this view upon others who may have become Christians by another method. Having stated this position distinctly and positively, the Church then issued a challenge to the Baptist Convention, pointing out that if it passed such a resolution, expelling these "differing" churches from the Convention, it would, in fact, be destroying that great Baptist tradition of local autonomy, which principle has permitted Baptists to further the

work of Christ in this nation and abroad in so distinctive a fashion. As a corollary, the Convention also would be establishing a precedent for the creation of a church hierarchy and all that that implies. The State Convention failed to give the expulsion resolution a simple majority in the fall of 1973, and the following year, defeated a constitutional amendment which would have denied voting rights to all churches that did not require baptism by immersion as a prerequisite to full membership.

As the Binkley congregation sought to maintain this principle of unity in the Christian Church, it expanded its cooperative ventures with other churches and other people. As a member of the American Baptist Convention, it was a participant in the formation of the American Baptist Churches of the South in 1970; membership was approved by the Church on July 18th of that year. Binkley members Robert Seymour, Sam Hill, Henry Hellmers and Bob DesJardins played a significant role in the organization of this association. Because the predominant number of member churches are black congregations, its growth and development has been heralded as a major step forward in Southern race relations. Dr. Seymour has represented the Binkley Church in numerous capacities on the national board of the American Baptist Convention, now known as the American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A., as well as the American Baptist Churches of the South.

One of the basic tenets of the Binkley Baptist Church has always been that the financial resources of the congregation should not be expended primarily in the bricks and mortar of a physical plant, but, rather, that they should be used principally to extend the ministry of our Lord through a vigorous program of outreach to people. A number of challenges have been accepted by this Church as it has sought to express this conviction.

Even while planning its new building in 1963, the Church was considering ways in which the new facility could be used for the benefit of the community. The first project was undertaken in the fall of 1965, when the Binkley Kindergarten was opened. This school, with a state approved program, was organized as a separate non-profit enterprise with the Church donating space and utilities. In return, the Kindergarten agreed to make scholarships available to underprivileged children. This school thrived until 1977, when, due to establishment of state-supported kindergartens, it was converted into a pre-school program for younger children. It is still functioning vigorously.

When an increase in building space became necessary in 1967, due to the growing congregation and the need for additional church school classrooms, the congregation made a deliberate decision to accompany this capital improvement program with a new major effort for outreach in the community -- the Carr Court Community Project. Carr Court, a black, poverty-ridden neighborhood in Carrboro, needed help in getting a youth recreation program started. Binkley Church members went to work tearing down an old house which blocked the removal of a smaller structure that was donated by the University Baptist Church to serve as a community center. By October, 1968, this small house was moved into place at Carr Court and, by February of 1969, it was staffed with a Director operating a program eagerly participated in by many of the one hundred children residing in the neighborhood. In cooperation with the Multi-Purpose Center of Chapel Hill-Carrboro, the Binkley Church underwrote the budget for the Center during the next eight years. In 1971, VISTA workers began working at Carr Court under the sponsorship of the Chapel Hill Inter-Church Council; they remained for three years. By 1972, the residents of the community had formed the Carr Court Administrative Committee which drew up job descriptions and qualifications desired for the position of director of the Carr Court Center, and hired the new director. In 1975 the Center leadership decided to seek local contributions to financially support the program. In June 1976, the Town of Carrboro, through its Recreation Commission, planned to assume full responsibility for the program, and announced the condemnation of the old building. The success of this project can be measured through the developing sense of community among the people of Carr Court, by the development of initiative in their own leadership,

and, above all, by the children's awareness of new perspectives, opportunities and potential.

By July of 1970, the Ridgefield Apartments for low income families opened at the end of Estes Drive under the sponsorship of the Chapel Hill Housing Authority. In cooperation with the Housing Authority and the Community Church, Binkley responded to the need for a daycare facility for the working mothers of Ridgefield. A daycare center was opened, with the older children at the Ridgefield Apartment Community Center, and the infants and toddlers in the nursery at Binkley, where space and utilities were donated by the Church. The program continued until 1976, at which time the Community Church and the Housing Authority terminated their involvement. Binkley Church assumed these responsibilities including housing the entire operation.

The Center was renamed the Binkley Child Care Center in order to help identify its location; its objectives, organization and operation continue on the same basis, serving the same people.

In July, 1971 the Church made one room available on an experimental basis to the Orange County Association of Retarded Children for a daycare center serving developmentally disabled children. From a nucleus of five children this activity grew to a regular five day a week school with 18 registered students and 7 faculty members under the sponsorship of the Orange Mental Health Association and Binkley Baptist Church. It remained at Binkley until June, 1978, when it moved to larger quarters provided by the County at the Northside Center.

At the same time that this school was getting started, the Church made an offer to the Chapel Hill Recreation Commission to provide space during the summer for the operation of a day camp, knowing that a facility was actively being sought. Because the kindergarten did not operate during the summer, adequate indoor and outdoor areas were available for the camp. This program operated at Binkley each summer for four years. It was moved to the Ridgefield Neighborhood Center in 1976 when the Ridgefield Day Care Center was shifted entirely to the Church.

Not only were the Church's educational facilities fully utilized during the weekdays by the three schools, but the Church also offered its facilities for use by many civic and service groups. Organizations with no operating funds have been given free use of the building, while others have paid a nominal fee to help offset building operational costs. Nearly fifty groups and organizations use these facilities on a regular or occasional basis. In 1976, Binkley extended this ministry to house the community-sponsored Meals-on-Wheels program in the Church Lounge. The program provides hot meals at modest prices, delivered on a five day a week basis to persons living alone who are unable to prepare food at home. The program is now thriving in its second year, being catered by Memorial Hospital.

A number of mission opportunities have presented themselves to the membership over the years. In 1964, Bob Hyatt, a member of this congregation, went to Nicaragua through the sponsorship of the Duke University Religious Council to work toward building and operating a medical clinic in a small east coast village. Binkley sponsored several persons for summer work on this project over the next seven years. In 1975 a new mission opportunity, again involving Binkley members, put the Church in contact with Dr. Bill Hodges and his medical center at Limbe, Haiti. Impressed with Hodges' work, and the hospital's need for assistance, the membership sponsored two of its members, Ed Anderson, a physician, and Barbara Bibb, a registered nurse, both of whom spent two weeks at Limbe, and reported on the conditions and needs there. Anderson and Bibb paid their own expenses, so the Church funds were used for the purchase of medical supplies, which the volunteers took with them. Additional missions teams spent summer months at Limbe in 1976 and 1977. In 1978 the Church commissioned member



Kathi Wagoner as a teacher/missionary to Limbe for a year.

Also in 1975, Binkley Church cooperated with the Inter-Church Council in the resettlement of Vietnamese refugees then coming to the state. While assisting the Ngo family to settle in the Elliott Apartments, many Binkley members made friends with these warm and wonderful people who have become respected members of the community.

As these multifaceted extensions of Church life into the community increased during the passing years, the need for additional staff assistance developed. The mainstay of Binkley Church and its program has been Dr. Robert E. Seymour, who has served as fulltime pastor through the Church's 20-year history. He has exerted dynamic and progressive leadership not merely in the Church itself, but in ever widening circles beyond the immediate community. The calling of Dr. Seymour to this community can be counted as one of this congregation's major contributions to the progressive development of Chapel Hill.

In 1966, the Church called the Reverend William Currin as its first Associate Minister with special responsibilities in Christian Education. In 1970, he was succeeded by the Reverend Dale Sessions, and from 1973 to 1977, the Reverend Thomas Clifton served in this position. In 1978, after a thorough evaluation of staff and program needs, the congregation approved enlargement of the staff to include two Associate Ministers. The Reverend Bruce Page and the Reverend Carol Ripley joined the staff this year in June and September respectively.

There are so many persons who have worked selflessly in support of the Church and its program, as staff members or volunteers, that they simply cannot all be mentioned in this brief sketch. June Basile served as the Church's first pianist during the initial year of organization. Since 1959, Pearl Seymour has blessed the Church by serving as pianist and organist. Her total professionalism and loyalty have been a blessing through thousands of events of worship, marriage and recreation, in these 19 years. Rebecca Carnes has served as Director of Church Music for the past ten years, generously sharing her exceptional musicianship as both Choir Director and soprano soloist. Her drive and initiative have led the choir into performing many major works which they would not have otherwise attempted. She followed in the tradition of several gifted and able musicians who preceded her: James Gibbs, Jim Hall, Bert Adams, and Judy (Hughes) Harrison, who was the Church's first Director of Music with expanded duties beyond those of Choir Director. There are two Church members who stepped into the void created by departing associate ministers, and to whom the congregation is greatly indebted. Anne Barnes joined the Church Staff in 1969-1970 as Administrative Assistant and once again in 1977-1978 as Program Associate. Her exceptional organizational skills and administrative abilities have brought the Church smoothly through these times of membership growth when the staff was much below strength. Also in 1977-1978, member Louise Baker served as Director of Christian Education, bringing exceptional strength and vitality, and setting a high standard in this program area. Beginning in 1966, Binkley has been served by a long list of full time secretaries who have been invaluable to the success of the overall Church program. None have given more able and devoted service than Binkley member Claudia Cannady, and Homer Webb, the current Administrative Secretary. The list of faithful staff members could not be complete without the name of Johnny Lane, who for thirteen years has served as Binkley's efficient and reliable Sexton. He has conscientiously borne a major responsibility in allowing the Church to open its facilities to community use.

In May of 1962, Dr. Seymour received a proposal for the establishment of a student minister internship program at Binkley in cooperation with the Union Theological Seminary in New York City. Jim Forbes, who became the first student Ministerial Intern at Binkley, is now a member of the Union faculty. During the time when the new building was under construction and the Church House had to be relocated, the program was temporarily suspended. A new arrangement



was made with Duke University Divinity School in 1965, and a long line of impressive young men and women have served since that time; Herman Thomas, 1965-66 and 1967-68; Homer Singleton, 1966-67; Roger Butler, 1969-70; Dwight McCall, 1970-72; David Swink, 1972-72; Art Scott, 1973-74; Ann Moore, 1974-75. A new program, begun with Southeastern Seminary in 1975, brought Lynne Perkins, 1975-77, and Binkley member Matthew Moffitt in 1977-78.

Binkley faced a major decision when, in 1972, it received an offer to purchase its property. A special committee, headed by Ken Poole, studied the proposal and recommended against selling. Another committee, chaired by Jim Cansler, studied the relationship of Binkley's present site to the Church's ministry in the community. This committee concluded that "where the locus of the Church's life resides is basically immaterial. The real question ... is the Church's concept of itself and the priorities of its people." The purchase offer was rejected and the issue was indirectly addressed the next year when Binkley adopted a motto on the cover of its yearbook: "The Church in the Marketplace."

Although Binkley's central thrusts have changed little through the years, there have been certain innovations. For instance, because there is no place in the sanctuary designed for a baptistry and the Church for years faced the continuing necessity of using the baptistry of another church, a decision was made to build an out-of-doors baptistry in the courtyard. It was designed by a special committee chaired by Sam Wilburn, who also built it for the Church. The first baptismal service there was held in June, 1975.

In a community where the University population is so mobile, many of the members are away during the summer. In lieu of Sunday morning church school, a new family-styled service-in-the-round, especially designed for the participation of children, was launched in 1970. These services involve a variety of worship activities consisting of readings, skits and plays, and music of various types. These summer services have become very popular at Binkley and are enthusiastically anticipated each year by the congregation.

Since the late 1960's, when the membership began to grow substantially larger, interest developed in increasing small group activities, in seeking ways to reemphasize the extended family idea set forth by the Charter Members. This has been pursued by focusing on small group prayer services, social activities in the various neighborhoods, progressive dinners and other such activities.

A Maundy Thursday Supper, consisting of a very simple New Testament meal, followed by Holy Communion, was held in the back of the Sanctuary in 1967. It has since developed into a strong tradition at the Church, as has the Binkley Christmas Eve Service.

As Binkley's membership and programs have grown, considerable energy has been devoted to planning ahead. In 1960-62 the Future Planning Committee operated with Bill Moffitt serving as Chairman. It gave way to the Building Committee, chaired by Jack Whitaker, 1962-64, when the new building was constructed. Since then the Long Range Planning Committee has been ably led by Lin Brown, 1964-65; Fred Ellis, 1965-69; Mary Sanderford, 1974; Larry Nielsen, 1974-76; Warren Howard, 1976-78; and David Basile, currently serving, who also led the Building Committee on the occasion of the wing addition built in 1968. In pursuing the exacting task of a thorough self re-examination as preliminary to considering goals for the next decade or two, the Church transformed the Committee into a Long Range Planning Council, expanding its membership and the scope of its responsibilities. In 1977, the Church contracted with the American Baptist Extension Corporation for assistance and guidance in the self study procedure. In this, the twentieth year of Binkley Church's existence, the membership will be planning new initiatives and goals for the life of the Church over the next twenty years. It will be a time of work and faith as society continues to present a growing challenge to the Church and Christians everywhere.

These past twenty years have been rich and rewarding ones for all who have lived the experience of Binkley Memorial Baptist Church. It seems that those who have been members of the Church continue to think of themselves as members even after they leave the area. May the members during the next 20 years of Binkley Church history likewise be challenged and rewarded as they share in the work and joy ahead.

*This church history was prepared especially for Binkley's 20th anniversary celebration by John L. Humber, longtime member of the church. The history opens with an account of the first 10 years, which narrative is excerpted verbatim from a paper written in 1968 by the late Courtland Smith, a member of the Binkley congregation for several of its first 10 years of existence.*

#### CHARTER MEMBERS

BAILEY, Barbara B.	+GILMORE, Irene
BAILEY, Rand	GILMORE, John
*BASILE, David G.	GILMORE, James
*BASILE, June	HAWES, Horace
BASILE, Janine	+LLOYD, Thomas W.
BARNETT, Richard	LLOYD, Thelma
BARNETT, Betty	LLOYD, Jimmie
*BERKUT, Mike K.	LOTZ, Denton
+BERKUT, Cora Lee	*MOFFITT, John W.
BERKUT, Nancy	*MOFFITT, Hilda
BERKUT, Jack	+PENDERGRAFT, Elmer
BOLCH, Oscar H., Jr.	*PENDERGRAFT, Ernestine
CREEL, Graham	RAWLS, Reginald
+CREEL, Ruby	*RAWLS, Irma
CREEL, Bill	RICE, Wilma
ELDER, Glenn H.	*SCOTT, Watts
ELDER, Karen	*SCOTT, Peggy
*ELLIS, Fred W.	+SCOTT, Beverly
*ELLIS, Elizabeth	SMITH, Kendall O.
ELLIS, Barbara	SMITH, Irene
ELLIS, Mary Beth	UNDERWOOD, Evelyn
ELLIS, Frances	*WAGONER, Leo
FREEMAN, Donald	*WAGONER, Grace
FREEMAN, Ina B.	WALL, Paddy Sue
GIBBS, James	*WHITAKER, Jack O.
GILMORE, J. Ed	*WHITAKER, Iris M.
	WHITE, James B.
	WHITE, Joyce
*Current Resident Members	*WILBURN, Same
+Deceased	*WILBURN, Nettie





